



Access to Justice

Pro Bono Activities

The Missouri Bar has always been committed to justice for all, which means access to the legal system for all of Missouri's citizens – especially those who can least afford legal representation in both civil and criminal matters.

The Missouri Bar and The Missouri Bar Foundation have sponsored various studies to assess the legal needs of the poor in Missouri and the funding that is necessary to meet these needs. The Missouri Bar has led efforts to increase funding for the four legal aid offices serving Missourians and has also been a staunch supporter of additional funding for the Missouri State Public Defender System.

The state bar also recognizes the need for prosecuting attorneys to have the best possible personnel and services, and encourages public support for these lawyers in all ways possible.

The Missouri Bar also recruits and recognizes volunteer attorneys in a variety of ways. The bar's major publications have featured stories on the legal aid offices in Missouri and their need for more volunteers. In addition, ethics programs produced by The Missouri Bar include reminders that Missouri lawyers have an ethical duty to provide pro bono services. To highlight the valuable work of volunteer lawyers, the state bar also annually presents awards to lawyers who have performed outstanding pro bono work.

In 2011, The Missouri Bar launched a new pro bono website. The website idea came out of a Pro Bono Summit organized by The Missouri Bar in 2010 and was developed with the involvement of the Delivery of Legal Services Committee. The new website provides a location where lawyers who are interested in finding pro bono opportunities can learn about organizations and entities in Missouri that serve low-income individuals and need legal assistance. Lawyers contact the organization directly to determine if the needs of the organization/entity represent a good match and, if so, volunteer their services. The Delivery of Legal Services Committee is responsible for maintaining the content of the new website and participating organizations/entities have direct access to update their specific information.

Also new in 2011, The Missouri Bar began asking Missouri lawyers to voluntarily report electronically the number of pro bono hours they contributed during the previous year. The report form will be assessed periodically and made available on The Missouri Bar website. In addition,

The Missouri Bar will utilize the reporting information to gain a better understanding of the type and volume of pro bono activities that Missouri lawyers perform annually. The reporting information allows The Missouri Bar to further recognize lawyers who uphold the noble tradition of pro bono service within the legal profession. Specifically, lawyers who report 40 hours or more of pro bono service in a year will be added to The Missouri Bar's Pro Bono Wall of Fame. The Wall of Fame will be accessible on the Missouri Bar website, The Missouri Bar Pro Bono website and The Missouri Bar's pro bono hours reporting webpage. In addition, the lawyers who appear on the website will receive special recognition from the President of The Missouri Bar and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Missouri. This includes a specially designed "Wall of Fame" lapel pin, a Wall of Fame certificate of achievement, and recognition in publications and at venues throughout the year.

The dedication of Missouri's legal profession to the principle and tradition of pro bono service was clearly illustrated in the spring of 2011 and throughout the rest of the year as The Missouri Bar (including President John Johnston and The Missouri Bar Young Lawyers' Section) teamed up with lawyers from a wide range of legal organizations and entities to respond to the legal needs of the Joplin area in the aftermath of the devastating tornado that struck southwest Missouri.

The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service

In addition to providing ongoing service to the more than 7,000 people who called The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service this year, the LRS became an integral part of the recovery efforts of lawyers helping storm survivors in the Joplin area. Last May, in the days following the destruction of much of Joplin, lawyers from The Missouri Bar, the local legal services offices and the Missouri Association of Trial Attorneys opened a legal relief station in Joplin. Anyone with legal questions could speak with these lawyers and receive legal advice at no cost. The volunteer lawyers offered guidance to those in need but could not accept fee-generating cases. Storm survivors who needed legal representation were referred to The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service.

To alleviate some of the strain caused by the legal problems affecting Joplin storm survivors, the bar's

Lawyer Referral Service waived the \$25 referral fee for any person whose problems were related to the storm. In addition, an effort was made to recruit additional Joplin attorneys into the LRS so that storm victims could receive help, conveniently, from a hometown attorney. This resulted in a some two dozen free referrals to Joplin storm victims. Many more Missourians were provided free legal advice from the attorneys at the legal relief station and the more than 200 lawyers who volunteered to provide free legal advice over the phone.

It is not only potential clients who benefit from the Lawyer Referral Service. Lawyers throughout the state appreciate the new clients that the LRS has screened and directed to them. The past few years have been difficult ones for attorneys. As the bar's *Economic Survey* has shown, the average income of attorneys has dropped in the wake of the housing and credit crisis that weakened the state's and nation's economy. At a time when most law firms are eager for additional clients, the LRS has gained a reputation for providing new, screened clients to its member attorneys. Approximately 245 Missouri lawyers are now members, belonging to a variety of practice area panels.

The LRS works simply and efficiently. For a \$25 administrative fee, callers are matched to attorneys who handle their type of legal problem in their part of the state. The \$25 referral fee includes up to a 30-minute consultation with an attorney. Callers who are referred receive the name of one attorney who is a member of the service. During that consultation, they are able to ask the attorney legal questions that concern them. Some callers are not involved in situations that require a long-term relationship with an attorney. They may not want extensive counseling or to be represented, but they do want several legal questions answered. Offering callers an opportunity to have a legal question answered for \$25 is a unique feature of the LRS, one that is valued by callers. The number of attorneys who provide a free initial consultation appears to be declining. Callers have mentioned that they are pleasantly surprised to learn they can get an answer to a legal question as part of their referral fee.

If, after the initial consultation, the caller decides to use the attorney's services, the client is charged by the attorney at a rate determined by the lawyer and client. Each referral is tracked and followed up, and clients are regularly provided client satisfaction surveys.

The public is made aware of the LRS in a variety of ways. In the past, the LRS relied on ads placed in telephone directories throughout the state, except for the St. Louis area and Greene County, which are both served by their local bar association LRS. But each year, fewer and fewer callers have reported that they learned about the LRS through a telephone directory. In contrast, the number of callers who learned about the LRS on the Internet has been climbing steadily. As a result of this shift, the LRS advertising budget will be greatly reduced in the years

ahead, with fewer and fewer dollars being allocated to telephone directories.

It's not just potential callers who need to know about the LRS: court clerks, lawyers, librarians and social service agencies can – and do – direct the public to the bar's LRS. Occasional mailings to these groups remind them about the LRS. A poster promoting the LRS was sent to libraries this year, and will be sent to courthouses in the coming year. The LRS coordinator displays information about the service at the Missouri Library Association Annual Meeting and circuit clerk meetings. In addition, a regularly updated blog, sponsored and created by the bar's LRS, has provided law firm personnel with reminders about the availability of the LRS. Typically, the most common way that the public learns about the LRS is through lawyers who refer them to the service. Lawyers know that if they have a conflict of interest or if a potential client's problem is one that isn't part of the focus of their practice, the LRS is a convenient resource.

Although everyone who calls The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service is addressed respectfully, most callers do not choose to be referred to an attorney. After discussing their situation with the bar's LRS coordinator, the caller may be referred to a social service agency or other justice system agency, such as police departments or adult abuse shelters. Because of the weak economy, a majority of callers feel they are not able to pay the \$25 fee or decide it is not worth it to pay for a referral. Others call with the goal of finding an attorney who will accept their case on a pro bono basis. Unfortunately, The Missouri Bar LRS does not have a listing of lawyers who accept pro bono cases. Callers are advised that they may qualify for help at one of the state's legal services offices, or that they might discuss the possibility of pro bono representation with a local attorney. Some callers who are deterred by the \$25 fee decide to use the Internet to find an attorney.

The Internet is an increasingly popular way for people to find lawyers who practice in their community. The Missouri Bar has a Lawyer Search function on its website, www.mobar.org. This part of the bar's website has heavy visitor traffic, and most people are comfortable researching attorney qualifications by browsing attorney websites. Some people will always prefer talking person-to-person about their legal problem, instead of searching the Internet for an attorney. People who call The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service have the opportunity to talk to a trained and experienced coordinator who can help steer them to the legal help they need.

In addition to telephone calls, the LRS also receives e-mail requests for attorneys. Requests are screened and the e-mails are followed up with a phone call from the LRS before a referral is made.

The Missouri Lawyer Referral Service receives calls from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday (except holidays). The LRS telephone number is 573-636-3635.